

Report No. MON. 29

Transmitted on Westward Television -
"Westward Diary"

Length 5 mins.

Date 8th December, 1969

Time 6 P.M.

Short Title P.C.B.

Del Cooper: "New warning to Britain on wild life sea deaths". "Riddle of the ditch of death". "This stinking sea". They're three headlines that point to the grim possibility that the seas around the South-West could be polluted by a poisonous chemical. The chemical is known as P.C.B. It's a poisonous waste substance that the plastics industry dumps at sea, the sea in question being the Irish Sea. There is a possibility that it drifts down the Irish Sea towards the coast of the South-West. Well, just how poisonous is it? Well, this autumn, about ten thousand guillemots, a common sea bird, died in the Irish Sea, the big concentrations of P.C.B. were found in the carcasses of the dead birds, but it could be that the poison substance has found new victims. Over the last few weeks, dead and dying baby seals have been washed up along the coast all around the South-West. Well, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries seal experts have said that the seals have died from pneumonia and that their deaths aren't abnormal, but Mr. Arthur Bourne, who is the Chairman of the Ocean Resources Conservation Association, an independent body of marine scientists, isn't so sure. He feels there have been far too many deaths. During the last few weeks, fifty dead and dying seals have fetched up around our coast, including one reported in the Scillies today, and the connection with the poisonous P.C.B.? Well, the Ministry admit that this substance has been found in commercial fish around the coast, particularly in the Irish Sea and

MONS 030365

fishermen in the South West have reported pollack, cod, sickly, underweight and in some cases with ulcers on their bodies. Well, could there be r.C.B. in these fish? Well, this is a question I'd like to put to Mr. ARthur Bourne, who's in our London studio.

Mr. Bourne, is it possible that the poisonous fish had been eaten by these seals who have subsequently died?

Mr. Bourne: I suppose it's possible, yes, we have no evidence of this though and I hope the Ministry's scientists are, in fact, investigating this very point.

D. Cooper: Now we've had fifty seal deaths around our coasts, do you regard this as being abnormal?

Mr. Bourne: I do for the Cornish colonies, yes. Where you get a large colony, such as in the Orkneys and so on, you might get quite a large number of deaths at this time of the year, but no, not in Cornwall. Furthermore, people who know the area well, would have spotted this kind of thing going on years past, but they haven't. They've come across up to about seven, perhaps ten dead seals in the time we've had recently where we've got fifty ... this is - what - ninety per cent more.

D. Cooper: Of course one thing that would worry, I think, a lot of people is that if this r.C.B. can get into fish, can it also get into people?

Mr. Bourne: Well, if it gets into fish and we eat the fish, obviously it can get into us, yes.

D. Cooper: How worried are you that this might happen?

Mr. Bourne: Well, I think we're all worried about this kind of pollution, I don't think it's just me ... any one individual ... any group of individuals, we are all concerned. What we want to see done is the Natural Environment Research Council, the Ministry of Ag and Fish, to look into this for

our benefit, not just for the wild life, this is our environment too.

D. Cooper: There is some suggestion, in fact, that the Government isn't telling us the whole truth about P.C.B.

Mr. Bourne: No, I don't know about that because, let's be honest, when we had the guillemot disaster, which you mentioned, the N.E.R.C. did, in fact, call a Council of their experts and bodies involved in this and they did put out a press statement. I think what is lacking is a more co-ordination and a speedier investigation of such happenings in the future. We should have somebody there ... and still should have somebody in the area now, looking into this.

D. Cooper: What practical steps do you think ought to be taken at this moment?

Mr. Bourne: Well, one of them I've just hinted at is that we should have a group of scientists on the spot, looking at the seals who are still coming in, taking blood samples for virus studies and so on, taking tissue out for chemical analysis, so that they can get right to the laboratories without any delay, and also have the authority to call in other specialists who they think they require at any one time.

D. Cooper: For many years a lot of scientists suspected that D.D.T. was a poisonous substance which could eventually harm human beings, do you think this P.C.B. is in the same class?

Mr. Bourne: Well, it's not far off it, yes, I think it could build up and build up in the fat tissue just like D.D.E. which is a breakdown substance from D.D.T. Already it has been reported from the Baltic and from the Dutch coast, from fish, wild fowl and other animals in their environment. It's increasing, obviously.

D. Cooper: Should people be worried at this stage anyway, about eating fish?

Mr. Bourne: No, I don't think so, I shouldn't think so at all. There's a lot of scare about at the moment but I hope that the Minister of Agriculture and Fish will allay this one by saying: "Well, we're looking into the fish and the seals for these chemicals", and tell us exactly what is happening and what they've found.

D. Cooper: Mr. Bourne, thank you very much indeed.

... oOo ...

MONS 030368